

A History of Foreign Leaders and Dignitaries Who Have Addressed the U.S. Congress

What are the methods that Congress has used historically to receive addresses by foreign leaders and dignitaries?

There are three such methods: joint meetings, joint sessions, and separate House and Senate receptions.

What is a joint meeting of Congress?

A joint meeting is the preferred method for receiving addresses from foreign leaders and dignitaries. Joint meetings also are used for special commemorative events and to receive addresses by domestic dignitaries. To initiate a joint meeting, both houses, by resolution or by unanimous consent, declare themselves in recess for a joint gathering in the House chamber. House Rule IV governs this procedure:

“The Hall of the House shall be used only for the legislative business of the House and for caucus and conference meetings of its Members, except when the House agrees to take part in any ceremonies to be observed therein. The Speaker may not entertain a motion for the suspension of this clause.”

As precedent has evolved, however, the House has tended to use unanimous consent, rather than a resolution, for the purpose of receiving a foreign leader.

What is a joint session of Congress?

A joint session of Congress has been used almost exclusively to receive the President’s State of the Union Address (prior to 1942 called the Annual Message), other presidential addresses, and the counting of electoral votes for the President and Vice-President of the U.S. Both chambers follow a formal procedure to establish these occasions by adopting a concurrent resolution. Only twice have foreign dignitaries addressed a joint session of Congress: French Ambassador Andre de Laboulaye (20 May 1934), to mark the centennial of the death of the Marquis de Lafayette, and Cuban Ambassador Guillermo Belt (19 April 1948), to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Cuban independence after the Spanish-American War in 1898.

What is a House or Senate reception?

Earlier in Congressional history the standard manner in which both the House and the Senate received addresses by foreign leaders was to invite dignitaries to a one-

chamber reception. This procedure required either unanimous consent or resolution by the chamber that wished to receive the foreign leader. According to Congressional Research Service (CRS), 122 such receptions have occurred in both chambers. Louis Kossuth, Governor of Hungary, was the first foreign dignitary to address a Senate reception (5 January 1852) and a House reception (10 January 1852).

These receptions are not associated with other informal, social receptions and lunches provided for foreign leaders on behalf of congressional leadership or individual committees. In the post-World War II era, the practice of using one-chamber receptions largely disappeared. The last Senate reception to host a foreign dignitary was held for West German Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger (18 August 1967); the last House reception was held for Mexican President Joe Lopez Portillo (17 February 1977).

Trends over time

As the United States attained greater status in the 20th century, the method used to invite foreign leaders and dignitaries to address Congress evolved.

The practice of receiving foreign leaders before joint meetings or joint sessions was exceedingly rare prior to World War II. The French general and Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette made the first joint meeting address before Congress in 1824. A full half-century passed before another foreign leader was extended the honor. On 18 December 1874, King David Kalakaua of Hawaii, became the first member of royalty accorded the honor of appearing before a joint meeting of Congress. Hawaiian Chief Justice Elisha Hunt Allen, a former Member of the U.S. House, delivered the king's address because the monarch was incapacitated with a head cold. French Ambassador Andre de Laboulaye spoke before a joint session of Congress on 20 May 1934. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed a joint meeting of Congress on 26 December 1941—less than three weeks after the U.S. entered World War II.

Churchill's address, the first of three he delivered before Congress, began a new trend in which Congress invited foreign leaders to address joint meetings rather than just one-chamber receptions. Within the next decade nine additional joint meetings were held for foreign leaders.

After the Second World War, foreign leaders who addressed joint meetings often represented America's close wartime allies—particularly those from Atlantic Alliance countries. A large number also represented newly-emerging democracies in Asia, South America, Latin America, and Africa.

Fast Facts

Below are some quick-reference facts about foreign leaders and dignitaries who have addressed Congress.

Who was the first foreign leader or dignitary to address Congress?

The Marquis de Lafayette, the French general and Revolutionary War hero, was the first foreign dignitary to address the United States Congress. Lafayette delivered a speech before a joint meeting on 10 December 1824. He was one just three foreign figures who were not heads of state to address a joint meeting of Congress. The others were Polish Solidarity Leader Lech Walesa in 1989, and Nelson Mandela, then Deputy President of the African National Congress in 1990.

On how many occasions have foreign leaders or dignitaries addressed joint meetings?

Including UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's 17 July 2003 address to a joint meeting of Congress, there have been 92 joint meeting addresses delivered by foreign leaders and dignitaries extending back to Lafayette's in 1824.

- Including Blair, 88 leaders or dignitaries representing 45 countries and kingdoms have addressed joint meetings of Congress.
- Eleven (11) monarchs or royalty have addressed joint meetings of Congress.
- Six (6) women have addressed joint meetings of Congress. Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands was the first (6 August 1942). Others who followed include: Queen Juliana of the Netherlands (3 April 1952), Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands (21 April 1982), UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (20 February 1985), Philippine President Corazon C. Aquino, Nicaraguan President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (16 April 1991).
- Three generations of the same family have delivered joint meeting addresses to Congress: Queen Wilhelmina (1942), her daughter Queen Juliana (1952), and her granddaughter Queen Beatrix (1982).
- The years in which the greatest number of foreign leaders or dignitaries have addressed joint meetings of Congress: 1976 (5), 1985 (5), 1954 (4), 1959 (4), 1960 (4), 1989 (4), 1994 (4).

- Historically, European leaders and dignitaries have most frequently addressed joint meetings of Congress: Europe including Russia (36), Western Hemisphere (23), Asia/ Pacific (20), Middle East (8), Africa (5).

How many times has a British leader or dignitary spoken before a joint meeting of Congress?

Counting Blair's 17 July 2003 address, United Kingdom leaders and dignitaries have made seven joint meeting addresses before Congress. Other UK leaders who have addressed joint meetings of Congress: Queen Elizabeth II (16 May 1991), Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (20 February 1985), Prime Minister Clement Atlee (13 November 1945), Prime Minister Winston Churchill (26 December 1941, 19 May 1943, 17 January 1952). An eighth UK leader—Winston S. Churchill, MP, and grandson of Prime Minister Churchill—participated in a joint meeting to commemorate the birth centennial of Dwight D. Eisenhower on 27 March 1990.

What country has the distinction of sending the most leaders and dignitaries to deliver joint meeting addresses before Congress?

The United Kingdom and France lead the list with seven joint meeting addresses per country by heads of state or dignitaries. One Frenchman has addressed a joint session. In descending order other countries leading the list of joint meeting addresses include: Mexico (5), Ireland (5), Italy (5), Israel (5), Germany, including West Germany and unified Germany (4), South Korea (4) India (3), Canada (3), Argentina (3), and the Philippines (3).

What foreign leader has made the most appearances before a joint meeting of Congress?

Winston Churchill made more addresses to Congress than any other individual. He addressed joint meetings in 1941, 1943, and 1952. Nelson Mandela of South Africa has addressed Congress twice, in 1990 and 1994. Yitzak Rabin of Israel also addressed joint meetings of Congress on two occasions, in 1976 and 1994.

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Addresses by foreign heads of state and dignitaries:

<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/17/2003	Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom addresses a joint meeting of Congress.
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/12/2002	Prime Minister John Howard of Australia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD. ¹)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/12/2001	The scheduled address by Prime Minister John Howard of Australia to a joint meeting of Congress is cancelled.
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/06/2001	President Vicente Fox of Mexico addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/14/2000	Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/15/1998	Emil Constantinescu, President of Romania, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/10/1998	Kim Dae-jung, President of South Korea, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/27/1997	Eduardo Frei, President of Chile, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/11/1996	John Bruton, Prime Minister of Ireland, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/10/1996	Benyamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/01/1996	Jacques Chirac, President of France, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	12/12/1995	Shimon Peres, Prime Minister of Israel, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/26/1995	Kim Yong-sam, President of South Korea, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/06/1994	Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/26/1994	Hussein I, King of Jordan, and Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, address a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/18/1994	Narasimba Rao, Prime Minister of India, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/17/1992	Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/30/1992	Richard von Weizsäcker, President of Germany, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

¹ CD denotes source as the *Congressional Directory*

<i>Joint meeting</i>	11/14/1991	Carlos Saul Menem, President of Argentina, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/16/1991	Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/16/1991	Violeta B. de Chamorro, President of Nicaragua, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/26/1990	Nelson Mandela, Deputy President of the African National Congress, South Africa, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/07/1990	Giulio Andreotti, President of the Council of Ministers of Italy, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/21/1990	Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	11/15/1989	Lech Walesa, chairman of Solidarność labor union, Poland, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/18/1989	Roh Tae Woo, President of South Korea, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/04/1989	Carlos Salinas de Gortari, President of Mexico, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/07/1989	Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/23/1988	Robert Hawke, Prime Minister of Australia, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/27/1988	Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	11/10/1987	Chaim Herzog, President of Israel, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
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<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/18/1986	Corazon C. Aquino, President of the Philippines, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/11/1986	Jose Sarney, President of Brazil, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/09/1985	Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/13/1985	Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/20/1985	Raul Alfonsin, President Argentina, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/06/1985	Bettino Craxi, President of the Council of Ministers of Italy, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/20/1985	Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/16/1984	Miguel de la Madrid, President of Mexico, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/22/1984	François Mitterand, President of France, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/15/1984	Dr. Garrett FitzGerald, Prime Minister of Ireland, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/05/1983	Karl Carstens, President of West Germany, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/21/1982	Beatrix, Queen of the Netherlands, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/22/1977	Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau of Canada addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/23/1976	President William R. Tolbert, Jr., of Liberia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/02/1976	Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/18/1976	President Valery Giscard d'Estaing of France addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/17/1976	Prime Minister Liam Cosgrave of Ireland addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/28/1976	Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	11/05/1975	President Anwar El Sadat of Egypt addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/17/1975	President Walter Scheel of West Germany addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/15/1972	President Luis Echeverria Alvarez of Mexico addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/03/1970	President Rafael Caldera of Venezuela addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/25/1970	President Georges Pompidou of France addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	10/27/1967	President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz of Mexico addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/15/1966	President Ferdinand E. Marcos of the Philippines addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/28/1964	President Eamon de Valera of Ireland addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/15/1964	President Antonio Segni of Italy addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/12/1962	Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Shahanshah of Iran,

		addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/04/1962	President Joao Goulart of Brazil addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CR. ²)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	9/21/1961	President Manuel Prado of Peru addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CR.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/12/1961	President Mohammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/04/1961	President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/29/1960	Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/28/1960	Mahendra, King of Nepal addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/25/1960	President Charles de Gaulle of France addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/06/1960	President Alberto Lleras-Camargo of Columbia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/12/1959	Baudouin, King of the Belgians, addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/18/1959	President Sean T. O'Kelly of Ireland addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	03/11/1959	President Jose Maria Lemus of El Salvador addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/21/1959	President Arturo Frondizi of Argentina addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/18/1958	President Carlos F. Garcia of the Philippines addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/05/1958	President Theodor Heuss of West Germany addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/09/1957	President Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
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<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/17/1956	President Sukarno of Indonesia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	02/29/1956	President Giovanni Gronchi of Italy addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/27/1955	President Paul E. Magliore of Haiti addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
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<i>Joint meeting</i>	07/28/1954	President Syngman Rhee of South Korea addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/28/1954	Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/04/1954	Governor General Vincent Massey of Canada addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)

² CR denotes source as the *Congressional Record*

<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/29/1954	President Celal Bayar of Turkey addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/03/1952	Queen Juliana of the Netherlands addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	01/17/1952	Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	09/24/1951	Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi of Italy addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	06/21/1951	President Galo Plaza of Ecuador addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	04/02/1951	President Vincent Auriol of France addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/19/1949	President Gaspar Dutra of Brazil addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint session</i>	04/19/1948	Ambassador Guillermo Belt of Cuba addresses a joint session of Congress held to memorialize the 50 th anniversary of Cuban independence. (CR.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/01/1947	President Miguel Aleman of Mexico addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	11/13/1945	Prime Minister Clement R. Attlee of the United Kingdom addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	05/19/1943	Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	12/26/1941	Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom addresses a joint meeting of Congress. (CD.)
<i>Joint session</i>	05/20/1934	Ambassador Andre' de Laboulaye of France addresses a joint session of Congress held to memorialize the centennial anniversary of the death of Lafayette. (CR.)
<i>Joint meeting</i>	12/18/1874	A joint meeting of Congress is held to receive King Kalakaua of Hawaii. (CD.)
<i>Joint meeting</i> ³	12/10/1824	General Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert de Montier, the Marquis de Lafayette address the first joint meeting of Congress. (CD/CR)

³ Members of the Senate were invited informally to listen to Lafayette's address in the House Chamber. On December 9, 1824, Lafayette appeared before the Senate, but did not address it.

